

## Crisis or Opportunity?

7/23/2017  
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### Exodus 14:1-14

Then the Lord said to Moses: 2 'Tell the Israelites to turn back and camp in front of Pi-hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, in front of Baal-zephon; you shall camp opposite it, by the sea. 3 Pharaoh will say of the Israelites, "They are wandering aimlessly in the land; the wilderness has closed in on them." 4 I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will pursue them, so that I will gain glory for myself over Pharaoh and all his army; and the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord.' And they did so. 5 When the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled, the minds of Pharaoh and his officials were changed towards the people, and they said, 'What have we done, letting Israel leave our service?' 6 So he had his chariot made ready, and took his army with him; 7 he took six hundred picked chariots and all the other chariots of Egypt with officers over all of them. 8 The Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt and he pursued the Israelites, who were going out boldly. 9 The Egyptians pursued them, all Pharaoh's horses and chariots, his chariot drivers and his army; they overtook them camped by the sea, by Pi-hahiroth, in front of Baal-zephon. 10 As Pharaoh drew near, the Israelites looked back, and there were the Egyptians advancing on them. In great fear the Israelites cried out to the Lord. 11 They said to Moses, 'Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us, bringing us out of Egypt? 12 Is this not the very thing we told you in Egypt, "Let us alone and let us serve the Egyptians"? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness.' 13 But Moses said to the people, 'Do not be afraid, stand firm, and see the deliverance that the Lord will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians whom you see today you shall never see again. 14 The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to keep still.'

### 1. Niagara Falls

When I visited Niagara Falls, I was amazed at the amount of water that goes over the falls every day. I noticed that the water near the Niagara Falls never stops flowing. Similar to the water, our lives often can feel like there is a constant flow of challenges and difficulties that never seem to stop.

### 2. Crisis in the Exodus

The Book of Exodus tells us that God afflicted the Egyptians with the ten plagues. After the deaths of the firstborn, Pharaoh gave up on keeping the Israelites in Egypt and let them go. However, in just a few days, when the

Israelites were surrounded by the sea in front of them, and mountains on both sides, Pharaoh ordered his army to pursue the Israelites. Six hundred Egyptian war chariots were bearing down on the trapped Israelites. When the people of Israel noticed what happened, they were terrified and began to complain to Moses. They lost confidence in Moses' leadership. Listen to what the Israelites say to Moses in verses 11 & 12, "**Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? ...Is this not the very thing we told you in Egypt, 'Let us alone and let us serve the Egyptians'? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness.**" The Israelites complain: "Why did you lead us here?" and "Why didn't you leave us alone in Egypt? We were better off as slaves there."

How would you respond if you were Moses? How would you feel about being blamed for bringing the people out of Egypt? Many of us might be upset and leave the Israelites to suffer at the hands of the Egyptians. But Moses was not upset, and he says, "**Do not be afraid, stand firm, and see the deliverance that the Lord will accomplish for you today; ...The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to keep still**" (Exod. 14:13-14). Moses knew what God was going to do. The passage challenges us to ask the question, how do we react when we find ourselves in times of crisis?

### **3. Rembrandt's Painting**

The Dutch painter Rembrandt has many paintings. One of them is entitled, "The Storm on the Sea of Galilee," in which we can see the different disciples' reactions to the storm. One of them is focused on his own work trimming the front sail. Three of them are at the mast working frantically to fix the main sail. The man on the left in the middle is pounded by a huge wave and is hanging on to a guy wire for his life. The man on the right side of the boat is crouched over and trembling with anxiety. On the lower left in the back is a man leaning over the side of the boat. He seems like he is about to throw up. The two next to Jesus seem mad at him for sleeping. One shakes Jesus awake and the other raises his voice as if to say, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?!"

An interesting thing about the painting is that there are 13 people. But who is the thirteenth person? Scholars believe that Rembrandt painted himself as the thirteenth person in the painting. Rembrandt seems to ask us to identify ourselves with one of the thirteen disciples. Which person do you identify with? I do not know how I would react if I were in the boat, but I would

identify myself with the one who is sitting alone because I believe that if I do not have a solution, I would keep quiet and wait for help.

#### 4. Psalm 46

Psalm 46:1-2 says, “**God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea.**” The background of Psalm 46 is the invasion of the Assyrian army when they surround Jerusalem. The psalmist says that even if the world were to end, we need not fear. In the face of destruction, the writer expresses a confidence in God’s ability to save him. So in verse 10 the psalmist writes, “**Be still, and know that I am God! I am exalted among the nations, I am exalted in the earth.**” Even when war or destruction happens, if we stand still quietly, we will experience God’s power and majesty. How do we overcome crisis? The people of Israel learned through many difficult experiences that when they couldn’t think of any solution, the best way for them was to be quiet and wait for God’s intervention.

#### 5. A Miracle Story

I recently read the story about Nick and Brooklyn Schnarr. Nick and Brooklyn’s son was very sick when Brooklyn was pregnant. They learned that the baby had severe hydrocephalus, or a condition in which there is too much brain fluid. They were referred to the Cincinnati Children’s Hospital, where they were told that there was a 90% chance that the baby would either die shortly after birth or have such severe cognitive impairments that any quality of life would be hard to imagine. Brooklyn went into labor, and doctors expected the worst. However, when their son Charlie was born, he was healthy and normal. The medical experts had no explanation for what happened. Charlie somehow was able to have his brain naturally remove the fluid from his brain. Nurses and doctors alike said it was a miracle. Nick wrote on his facebook page, “I’m a practical person that certainly believes in science and medical technology, but I absolutely know, from the bottom of my heart, that God was involved in this. I give ALL of the credit and glory to him.”

What happened to the Israelites? Exodus 14:21 tells us that when Moses stretched out his hand over the Red Sea, “**The Lord drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night, and turned the sea into dry land.**” And the Israelites were able to go into the sea on dry ground. After the Israelites crossed the Red Sea, Moses and the Israelites praise the Lord by singing, “**The Lord is my strength and my might, and he had become my salvation**” (Exodus 15:2). We do not know exactly what happened, but we

know the result: God sets his people on his way. If God helped the Israelites cross the Red Sea, why did they have to suffer all kinds of trouble?

## 6. Conclusion

If we read Exodus 14 carefully, we notice Israel's crisis was created by the Lord. Verse 4 says, "***I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will pursue them, so that I will gain glory for myself over Pharaoh and all his army; and the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord.***" The purpose of doing this was to let the Lord gain glory and to let the Egyptians know that God is the Lord. God may not create the crisis in our lives or the life of our church, but in every situation, God is able to deal with every problem or task regardless of how big or small it is. When we face things in our lives, we look to God for the solution, waiting on the Lord when it may be difficult, and looking to God to give us direction about not only what to do, but also to perform miracles that show that God is the Lord.

In Asia, the meaning of the word "crisis" is often translated as a combination of "danger" plus "opportunity." Crisis can often seem as a danger, but the scripture reminds us that crisis can be an opportunity for the Lord to show us His almighty power and His providence in our lives.

## 7. Application

Last week, after my brother's departure for Korea, for a few days I thought seriously about the future of the Activity Center at our church. I was reflecting on the discussions that we had recently about making a decision sooner than later. I agreed. I didn't want to lose precious time without making any progress. On August 6, we will discuss our church finances and on August 13, we will be meeting with those who are interested in getting involved with the Activity Center. Before August 13, we'd like to confirm with as many people as possible. If you're interested, would you please return the interest form so that we know who we should include in the decision-making process? It is my prayer that the Activity Center gives us not crisis but an opportunity to experience God's almighty power.

Today, we are reminded in our passage that it was not Moses who led the Israelites in the wilderness but the Lord who made a way when there wasn't a way. We are called as people of faith to seek out and trust in the Lord especially in situations where there doesn't seem to be any hope or any solution. Are we experiencing crisis or opportunity right now? If we are in crisis, do we want to turn crisis into an opportunity? If that is what we want, we need to be silent and wait for God's intervention. Then we will give glory to

God who is in charge and faithful to bring all things to completion. We give thanks to the Lord for his unfailing love for each one of us and for this world. Amen.